

Use of Rapid Testing for Influenza Screening

Dear Health Care Provider:

In preparation for the coming influenza season, please be aware of the following issues regarding rapid influenza tests.

- Sensitivity for rapid influenza tests is about 70% (range 53-94%). Therefore, during the influenza season, a negative rapid test result does not exclude influenza.
- Specificity of rapid influenza tests is in the 80-99% range, so a positive rapid test for influenza is quite reliable during the peak influenza season. However, since the positive predictive value is much lower when there are fewer cases, a positive rapid influenza test during the summer has a greater chance of being a false positive.
- Not all rapid influenza tests differentiate between influenza A and B.
- ADHS will inform local health departments and providers when the first case of influenza has been confirmed indicating the start of the season.
- Information regarding seasonal activity level of influenza in Arizona can be found at our website: <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/epi/flu>

Recommendations:

- Once the influenza season has started, a positive rapid test is enough to confirm a case of influenza for public health purposes.
- During influenza season, it is not necessary to differentiate between influenza A and B for public health purposes.
- Interpret negative rapid influenza tests during influenza season with caution, especially if the clinical syndrome is compatible with influenza.
- When influenza is not in season, a positive rapid influenza test is more likely to represent a false positive and should be followed with a viral culture or PCR to confirm the diagnosis for public health purposes.
- Most respiratory illnesses are spread through infectious droplets. Proper infection control procedures should not be delayed pending testing results.